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RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 3857
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TASHKENT 001843

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DEPT FOR SCA/CEN AND DRL

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [UZ](#)

SUBJECT: NUMBER OF PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES GROWS...BUT IS
IT SET TO CONTRACT?

REF: A. TASHKENT 1810

[B](#). TASHKENT 1751

[C](#). TASHKENT 1576

Classified By: POLOFF R. FITZMAURICE FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D).

[1](#). (C) Summary: The field of presidential candidates for the December election continues to widen with reports that an independent initiative group has nominated National Human Rights Center Director Akmal Saidov. According to its leaders, the Birlik opposition party may also still nominate its own candidate. However, Embassy contacts report that the government plans for five of the six government-affiliated presidential candidates to drop out of the race before the election, leaving only one of them to run against President Karimov on December 23. Given that Karimov faced only one other candidate during previous presidential elections in 1991 and 2000, we believe that this scenario is quite plausible. End summary.

[2](#). (C) As of October 23, six GOU-affiliated candidates (five candidates, one from each of the officially registered political parties, plus one "independent" candidate nominated by an initiative group) have been nominated for the December 23 presidential election (ref A). At least six other individuals from human rights groups also have announced their intention to register as independent candidates (ref B). In order to finalize their candidacy for the presidential elections, nominees have to submit signatures from five percent of Uzbekistan's eligible voters by November [11](#).

GOU NOMINATES ITS OWN "INDEPENDENT" CANDIDATE

[3](#). (C) The latest GOU-sponsored entry to the presidential race is Akmal Saidov, the head of National Human Rights Center and Parliament's Committee for Democratic Institutions, who reportedly was nominated by an initiative group of 300 citizens on October 5. Unlike the nominations of independent candidates from human rights organizations, Saidov's nomination was reported by a state-controlled website and television station. The website described the initiative group as being composed of "members of various public and nongovernmental organizations." Saidov is Uzbekistan's first "independent" presidential candidate, though in reality, his candidacy appears no less orchestrated than that of the candidates from the five political parties. For example, during a government-organized human rights

conference on October 19 attended by poloff, Saidov spoke for over thirty minutes and failed to once mention his prospective nomination.

WILL THE CANDIDATE FROM BIRLIK PLEASE STAND UP?

¶4. (C) On October 9, Birlik Deputy Chairman Pulat Akhunov told poloff that Birlik leader Abdurakhmon Pulatov, who currently resides in the United States, was still deciding whether to form an initiative group and run for president from exile (ref C). Akhunov, who returned to Uzbekistan from Sweden in March to renew his passport, reported that authorities in Andijon told him that he would not be issued a new passport until next year. Akhunov believes that the government suspects that he may also try to run for president if he is issued a passport before the election.

¶5. (C) On October 9, Free Farmers Party head Nigara Khidoyatova said that she was approached by local Birlik leader Vasila Inoyatova, who told her that she was considering running in the election and asked for Khidoyatova's support. Khidoyatova said that she agreed to support Inoyatova, noting that she would support any candidate running against Karimov (Note: Khidoyatova is also the main financier of the Human Rights Alliance, which itself has submitted four candidates for the election). Inoyatova has yet to make any official announcement. (Comment: We believe that Inoyatova is waiting for Pulatov to make a final decision before deciding whether to run herself. End comment.)

KARIMOV REPORTEDLY TO FACE JUST ONE OTHER CANDIDATE IN

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¶6. (C) Poloff was told by two contacts with ties to knowledgeable government officials that the GOU ultimately plans to have only one official candidate run against Karimov in December, as occurred during the two previous presidential elections in 1991 and 2000. According to the contacts, the five other official candidates will drop out before the actual election is held on December 23.

¶7. (C) During a meeting with poloff on October 16, journalist and former IV participant Ikram Yokubov (strictly protect) said that Anvar Amidov, a former colleague of Yokubov who works in the "Information Security Studies" (ideological) department of the Institute of Strategic Studies, an influential government think tank, told him that the National Security Council held a meeting in September to discuss the government's plans for the December election. During the meeting, which was chaired by NSC First Deputy Secretary Mir-Akbar Rakhmankulov, it was announced that five

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of the six official candidates would eventually drop out of the presidential election, leaving only Asliddin Rustamov from the Public Democratic Party of Uzbekistan (PDPU) to run against Karimov in December. Yokubov noted that Rustamov, like Karimov, is originally from Samarkand and is trusted by the president. At the same meeting, it was reportedly announced that the government would invite foreign observers from Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries.

¶8. (C) Unlike the other four candidates from political parties, who each lead their own respective parties, Rustamov is not the titular leader of the PDPU, a position which now belongs to Latif Gulomov. Rustamov was the leader of the PDPU from 2003 until 2005, when he was replaced by Gulomov. Like the other four candidates, though, Rustamov was selected as a Vice Speaker of Parliament in July 2007. Yokubov expected that the careers of all six of the official presidential candidates will more or less be finished after

the election, just as former presidential candidate and PDPU leader Abdulkhafiz Jalolov eventually retired from politics following the 2000 presidential elections.

¶9. (C) Yokubov told poloff that he worked in the ideological department of the Institute of Strategic Studies from 2002 to ¶2004. He said that he was fired personally by Karimov at a meeting after presenting a memo calling on the President to combat growing corruption in the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD). Yokubov added that he had frequent contact with Karimov during his three years at the Institute and described him as a control freak who would never willingly relinquish power.

¶10. (C) During a meeting on October 5, Uch Tepe ex-deputy hokim (mayor) Adolat Nasirova (please protect) also told poloff that the government plans to have only one of the official candidates run against Karimov and that the other candidates will throw their support behind Karimov. Nasirova said that she was told this by Liliya Sultanova, the wife of ex-Prime Minister and current Chkalov Aircraft Production Plant General Director Uktir Sultanov. Sultanova did not identify which of the official candidates would be chosen to run against Karimov. Nasirova also reported that the Women's Committee has finalized plans to organize gatherings across Uzbekistan to encourage women to vote for Karimov. Furthermore, Nasirova said she was an acquaintance of Dilorom Tashmukhamedova, the leader of the Social Democratic Party "Adolat" (Justice) and the first female candidate to be nominated as a candidate for president, describing her as "a good person" but "sheepish" and "weak-willed."

INMATES FOR KARIMOV?

¶11. (C) During the meeting on October 16, Yokubov reported that prisoners in Bekabad were being pressured to vote for President Karimov in the upcoming election. Abdulkhafiz Pirnazarov, a former MVD investigative officer and former schoolmate of Yokubov, was reportedly told by the chief of Bekabad prison that inmates eligible for the expected December 8 amnesty will be forced to promise to vote for Karimov on December 23 before they are released. Pirnazarov

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did not know whether similar promises were being extracted from convicts at other prisons in Uzbekistan.

COMMENT

¶12. (C) While we cannot verify the information on the elections provided to us by our contacts, it is quite plausible that five of the six official candidates will drop out before the election, leaving only one of the candidates to face (and lose graciously to) President Karimov, as occurred earlier in 1991 and 2000. It may be possible that the other candidates will refuse to accept their nominations, fail to collect the necessary number of signatures or simply drop out of the process sometime before the actual election. It may also be possible that the government might make an international political statement and select Saidov, Uzbekistan's first independent candidate, or Tashmukhamedova, Uzbekistan's first female candidate, to run against Karimov, rather than Rustamov. The other major questions remaining about the election are (a) when will Karimov formally accept his party's nomination as a presidential candidate, and (b) how Karimov, who will be running in his third presidential campaign, will amend the constitution or otherwise explain away its current two term limit for presidents.

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